

Reject the AFL-CIO and Democratic Party

## For a new strategy to defend the social rights of the working class

Socialist Equality Party

4 April 2011

Throughout the country workers and young people are seeking a way to fight against the attack on collective bargaining rights and brutal spending cuts in public education, health care and other services. While workers are determined to fight, the perspective being advanced by the state and national AFL-CIO leaders who organized the “We Are One” protests is utterly bankrupt.

The protests, organized in conjunction with leading Democratic Party figures, are based on the lie that the Democrats are opposed to spending cuts and the assault on public employees. The replacement of Republicans with Democrats through recalls and in the 2012 elections, the union leaders claim, will advance the interests of the working class.

The experience of the last two-and-a-half years has demonstrated just the opposite. Tens of millions voted for Obama hoping to put a halt to the pro-business and militarist policies of the Bush years, only to see an escalation of the corporate attack on jobs, living standards and workplace rights. The wars and the billions spent on them have continued, and the administration has launched a new war in Libya on behalf of the oil monopolies.

After bailing out the banks and extending the Bush-era tax cuts, Obama is working with the Republicans to force the working class to foot the bill through slashing billions more in federal spending. This will only deepen the crisis of state and local governments and lead to more attacks on services and public employees. Under Obama’s watch, more than 400,000 public employees have already lost their jobs. The administration has frozen the wages of federal employees while spearheading merit pay, the destruction of tenure,

charter schools and other attacks on teachers and public education.

The attack on public employees is not simply the strategy of Republican governors in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and other states. In Illinois, California and New York, Democratic governors and state legislatures are slashing budgets just as savagely as their Republican counterparts. At the same time, they are outlawing strikes by teachers and other public employees.

In the case of the Democrats, however, the budget cutting is being carried out *with* the unions. In return for this collaboration in the attack on public employees, the Democrats allow the unions to retain their legal status and automatically deduct dues from workers’ paychecks. In the end, however, the result is the same: public employees see their jobs and living standards destroyed and social programs, which millions depend on, are gutted.

This only proves that both the Republicans and the Democrats are controlled by the financial oligarchy that rules the United States. While sparing no expense to bail out the Wall Street financiers who looted the economy, both big business parties claim “there is no money” to meet the most basic social rights of the working class.

From mid-February to mid-March, hundreds of thousands of workers and young people in Wisconsin stood up in defiance of this class-war policy in the biggest eruption of working-class struggle in America in three decades. The movement erupted largely outside of the control of the AFL-CIO and other unions, which did everything they could to subordinate it to the Democratic Party and the narrow self-interests of the trade union apparatus.

Workers instinctively understood that Walker's attack was aimed at turning the clock backwards and criminalizing any collective resistance to the unbridled dictatorship of the rich. From the beginning, however, the unions abandoned this right—won through bitter struggle—and accepted without question that workers accept devastating wage and benefit concessions, which amounted to an average cut in take-home pay of \$4,000 a year.

The unions rejected growing demands for a general strike to defeat Walker, even after he rammed through his bill. The unions have responded to the legal wrangling over the new law by rushing to sign scores of contract extensions that impose Walker's demands—and strip workers of their workplace rights—while preserving the dues check-off system for the union executives. Praising the unions for imposing millions in concessions on their members, Madison's Democratic mayor said, "We did it with collective bargaining. The system worked exactly the way it was supposed to work."

The trade unions function as part of the Democratic Party apparatus. The claim by pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organization that the unions and Democrats are on "our side" in the fight against the Republicans is a fraud. They are on the other side, and the sooner workers realize this the sooner a genuine fight back can be organized.

Every social struggle of the working people in US history—from the Populist Movement, to the founding of the industrial unions in the 1930s, to the Civil Rights and the antiwar movements—has been emasculated and rendered impotent by the Democratic Party.

Workers can only begin to fight for their own class interests by rejecting the "lesser evil" sham and developing an independent political movement in opposition to both big business parties and the profit system they defend.

The capitalist system has failed. In every country, the financial aristocracy is demanding austerity and dismantling the social and physical infrastructure needed for modern civilization. At the same time, the richest one percent consumes levels of personal wealth not seen since the *ancien régime* on the eve of the French Revolution.

Only the working class—mobilized in a mass socialist movement—has the power to put an end to inequality

and reorganize economic life to meet the needs of the majority of society, not the parasitic few. The economic and political dictatorship of the financial lords must be broken through the establishment of a workers' government dedicated to securing the social rights of all the working people.

All cuts in social spending and worker concessions must be rejected. Instead spending must be sharply increased to protect the victims of the economic crisis and expand access to high quality education, health care, decent housing and a secure income to all. This must be paid for through a sharp increase in taxes on the top corporations and richest individuals, who presently pay virtually nothing. The ill-gotten gains of the financial elite must be confiscated and put to use for social needs. The major banks and corporations must be nationalized and reorganized on the basis of producing for human need, not private profit.

The eruption of the class struggle in Wisconsin, coming on the heels of the revolutionary upheavals in Egypt and the Middle East, marks the beginning of a new period of determined struggle by the working class. The trade unions are thoroughly compromised and a part of the political establishment aligned against the working class. New organizations of struggle, based on the democratic control of the rank and file, must be built to wage an uncompromising fight in defense of the working class.

The most decisive question is building a new revolutionary leadership in the working class. The Socialist Equality Party is holding conferences in Ann Arbor, Michigan, New York City and Los Angeles on "The Fight for Socialism Today." We urge workers and young people to attend these conferences to elaborate a new socialist strategy and build the leadership required for the next stage of struggle of the working class.



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